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DAWN

Rightsizing plan puts fate of 40 Tibb colleges at risk

• Proposed merger of National Council for Tibb and National Council for Homoeopathy threatens future of 70,000 Hakeems • Health ministry says merger to be endorsed by parliament, in consultation with relevant sectors • Stakeholders say bill lacks 'saving clause'

By Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: The proposed closure of 40 Tibb colleges following a health ministry move to implement rightsizing — by merging the Council for Tibb and the Homeopathic Council through an Act of Parliament — has pushed over 70,000 traditional Hakeems towards an existential threat.

While talking to *Dawn*, Principal of Ajmal Tibbia College, Rawalpindi, Prof Imran Lodhi, said, "The ministry has drafted a bill proposing the merger of the two councils. The bill forwarded to the law division suggests abolishing colleges.

"We have been instructed not to admit students in the next academic session. Once existing students complete their studies, the colleges will be closed." He said that the move would also raise questions about the legal status of more than 70,000 practising Hakeems.

Prof Lodhi said there were three main categories of healthcare practitioners in Pakistan: allopathic, homeopathic, and Hakeems. He explained that while allopathic practice is regulated under the Drug Act, 1976, Hikmat operates under the Unani, Ayurvedic and Homoeopathic Practitioners Act, 1965, under which the National Council for Tibb and the National Council for Homoeopathy were established.

"At present, 40 Hikmat colleges and 140 homeopathic colleges are functioning across the country. Hikmat colleges admit matriculation students with science backgrounds, who must complete four years of education and a six-month house job to obtain a licence. Some universities — including Hamdard University, Qarshi University and Rawalakot University — admit FSc pre-medical students, who must complete four years of education and a one-year house job," he said.

Prof Lodhi said ministries and divisions were taking steps toward rightsizing following recommendations linked to the IMF.

General Secretary of the Pakistan Tibbi Alliance, Muhammad Sajjad, has written to the ministries of health and law, urging them to halt consideration of the draft bill.

He said the proposed "National Traditional and Complementary Medicine (NTCAM) Act, 2025" contained serious gaps that could lead to the closure of hundreds of Tibbia and homeopathic colleges and widespread unemployment among registered practitioners.

"Without an explicit saving clause, existing professional licences could fall into legal doubt, creating an unnecessary healthcare crisis. Traditional medicine colleges are the backbone of this sector. The bill does not provide deemed recognition to existing institutions, many of which have been operating since before the creation of Pakistan," he said.

He urged the government to protect the right to livelihood of Hakeems (holding Expert in Medicine and Surgery diploma) who have served rural and urban poor communities for decades.

Govt defends move

Spokesperson for the health ministry Sajid Hussain Shah said the merger was being carried out through an act of Parliament in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

He said the merger would streamline and improve the quality of Tibb and homeopathic education in line with allopathic standards.

A senior health ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the decision followed directives to reduce posts and expenditures.

On the other hand, Hakeems argued that they were often the only healthcare providers serving far-flung rural areas, as MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery) doctors rarely practise in their native regions.

Hakeem Muhammad Sajjad from Lahore told *Dawn* the annual budget of the National Council for Tibb was only Rs1.1 million, while the National Council for Homoeopathy's budget was Rs1.7m — less than the annual salary of a single BPS-17 employee.

Hakeem Sarfaraz Bhatti from Gujranwala believed no Hakeem would be able to practise once the bill was enacted into law. "It is unfortunate that departments consuming tens of millions of rupees from the exchequer were ignored, while two councils with minimal financial burden are being merged," he said.

Hakeem Muhammad Malik from Rawalpindi said: "The proposed bill prohibits Hakeems from preparing medicines and restricts them to prescribing company-manufactured drugs. However, companies do not produce medicines for rare diseases. If Hakeems are barred from practice, not only will treatments disappear, but the profession of herb sellers."

WORKERS sort freshly prepared jaggery (gurr), processed from sugarcane extract, on the outskirts of Peshawar.—Abdul Majeed Goraya

Joint katcha operation launched using drones, APCs

• Around 1,700 personnel deployed as Punjab and Sindh police, Rangers pursue riverine bandits • Dacoits warned to lay down arms

By Irfanul Haq

RAHIM YAR KHAN: A large-scale, joint operation by Punjab and Sindh police is ongoing in the katcha areas of Rahim Yar Khan, including Machka, Kacha Rajwani and Ronti, with 1,700 personnel, drones and armoured vehicles deployed against bandits.

According to Regional Police Officer (RPO) Bahawalpur Ghazi Muhammad Salahuddin, Rahim Yar Khan police had cordoned off Kacha Rajwani, with contingents from Rajanpur (Punjab) and Ghotki (Sindh) taking part. Sindh police and Rangers were also conducting action in adjoining riverine areas.

He said 1,700 police personnel had been deployed along with eight drone teams, six bulletproof vehicles and three armoured personnel carriers.

Modern technology was being used to ensure effective progress and restore law and order in the area, he said, adding that police were conducting action against criminal elements under a coordinated and well-planned strategy.

The RPO clarified that suspects who renounce criminal activities and voluntarily surrender to the police would not be engaged in encounters and would be produced before the courts in accordance with the law. However, criminals have been strictly warned to lay down their arms and surrender.

He further emphasised that the operation would continue until the writ of the government was fully established in the riverine areas.

District Police Officer (DPO) Rahim Yar Khan Irfan Ali Samo stated that action against criminals was ongoing and that ensuring the safety of the lives and property of the public remained the top priority.

According to details, police with a heavy contingent and full combat equipment have launched a decisive operation against bandits after cordoning off the areas of Machka and Kacha Rajwani.

Earlier this month, the Sindh government announced a "massive" operation against dacoits in the katcha areas of the province, vowing to eliminate them through the use of state force.

Speaking to reporters after presiding over a high-level meeting on the law and order situation in the Sukkur and Larkana ranges, Home Minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar said it had been decided that "we are definitely heading towards a massive operation".

"We will use whatever resources we have, with specific targets and take ruthless action against the infamous dacoits you see on social media," he said, adding that special focus would be placed on Sukkur and Larkana.

Mr Lanjar stressed that dacoits would be given a chance to lay down their arms and join the national mainstream. "But the absconders or criminals who consider themselves big champions, strict action will be taken against them. There will be a fight and they will be eliminated through the use of state force," he warned.

The home minister thanked the Punjab government for its support in a recent "successful" operation in which a no-go katcha area was vacated. He said individuals kidnapped from Sindh were recovered from Punjab with the full cooperation of the Rangers and other security agencies.

Another bridge in N. Waziristan blown up

By Pazir Gull

NORTH WAZIRISTAN: Another key bridge was blown up using explosives in the Mir Ali tehsil of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's North Waziristan district, causing severe difficulties for and triggering anger among residents.

According to police, the explosion occurred in Khushhali (Makinah) village of Mir Ali, where unidentified assailants carried out the blast late on Saturday night, destroying the bridge and cutting off the area's land connectivity with nearby settlements, markets and agricultural lands.

Soon after the incident, police and security forces cordoned off the area and launched an investigation.

Earlier on Wednesday, a bridge over the Kurram River in North Waziristan's Shewa tehsil was blown up.

Residents said students, patients, the elderly and women were the worst affected, while agricultural activities and local businesses also suffered heavily due to the destruction of the bridge. With no alternative routes available, they added, ambulances and other emergency services are facing serious hurdles, adding to public distress.

Expressing strong resentment, local tribal elder Malik Din Sardar said, "This bridge was the lifeline of our area. Now it has become extremely difficult to transport patients to hospitals. How long will we keep paying the price for such actions?"

He questioned why ordinary citizens were being made to suffer losses and hardships through no fault of their own.

Six of family shot dead over feud in Karak

By Ghulam Mursalin Marwat

PESHAWAR: At least six members of a family, including two women and children, were killed on Sunday when gunmen opened indiscriminate fire following a "domestic dispute" in the Sabirabad area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Karak district.

According to a Rescue 1122 official, upon receiving the report, rescue workers rushed to the spot immediately, accompanied by ambulances and medical teams. All the bodies were taken to the DHQ hospital for a post-mortem examination, he said.

The rescue official said that a six-year-old child and a three-month-old girl were among the deceased.

According to a police spokesperson, Shaukat Khan, "Upon receiving information about the incident, DPO Saud Khan took notice and directed the Sabirabad SHO to take immediate action."

"Acting swiftly, police arrested the suspect within moments of the incident and recovered the weapon used in the crime," he added.

The spokesperson said that the incident occurred following a "domestic dispute" when a man opened indiscriminate fire on family members, killing six people on the spot.

Earlier this month, a young man was shot dead in the Kandukhel area of Karak district.

Two killed in Dera Bugti landmine blast

By Ali Jan Mangi and Abdul Wahid Shahwani

DERA MURAD JAMALI / KHUZDAR: Two people were killed in a landmine explosion in the Dera Bugti district while planting it underground on Sunday.

Police officials said the explosion occurred in the Lanjo Safari area of Sui tehsil.

A security official said, "The deceased were apparently planting the mine in the area to target residents."

Police rushed to the site and shifted the bodies to Sui Hospital. Their identities could not be ascertained till late evening.

Security sources said the operatives were burying an underground landmine when it detonated. Following the incident, police and security forces reached the site and launched further investigations.

Grenade attack

Meanwhile, in another incident, unidentified assailants carried out a hand grenade attack near Aftab Chowk in the Sakran area of Hub district late on Sunday evening. No casualties were reported.

According to police sources, the attackers were riding a motorcycle. After throwing the grenade, they fled the scene. Police said the explosion did not result in any loss of life; however, it caused panic among residents of the area.

Following the incident, police cordoned off the area and launched an investigation.

In 2025, Pakistan ranked second in the Global Terrorism Index, with the number of deaths in terrorist attacks rising by 45 per cent as compared to the previous year.

At the start of this year, Balochistan's top police officer vowed to further strengthen the force in 2026 through improved planning, modern weapons and specialised training.

Kinnow trapped by border closure, Iran sanctions

AN aerial view of a kinnow orchard.—Dawn

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Afghan corridor in terms of speed or cost. "Through Afghanistan, kinnow would reach its destination fresh and competitive. Through Iran, the journey is simply too long for a perishable fruit. Resultantly, the shipment costs multiply manifold," Hanjra says.

Growers recall that Pakistan's presence in Russian, Ukrainian and Central Asian markets was built largely through exporters' own initiatives, particularly after Asean countries restricted kinnow import as Pakistani authorities failed to meet required documentation due to alleged demands for bribes and bureaucratic inertia.

Sajid Wining, a grower-cum-exporter who remained Pakistan's top fruit exporter for nearly 14 years, said he eventually exited the kinnow business due to chronic policy neglect. "At their peak, kinnow exports earned around $450 million annually," he said. "Yet fruit and vegetable exports were never treated as a strategic priority."

He also criticised the failure to develop seedless kinnow varieties, while competitors such as China and Egypt moved ahead with seedless mandarins, capturing premium markets.

Price crash amid bumper crop

The crisis has hit orchard owners brutally. A former MPA and ex-tehsil nazim of Sahiwal, Ghulam Ali Asghar Lahri, said juice factories are offering as little as Rs300 per maund.

He revealed that a contractor who had purchased his orchard for Rs27.5 million — paying Rs1.5 million as advance — walked away from the deal, forfeiting the amount because expected losses were far greater. "Some of my relatives are uprooting kinnow plants altogether," Mr Lahri said. "They don't see this crisis ending anytime soon."

Mohammad Mohsin Warraich, patron of Anjuman Kashtkaran, Sargodha, said the irony is that this year's kinnow crop is bumper and globally appreciated for its taste and appearance. Yet growers are being forced to sell at Rs1,200 per maund or even less, compared to Rs2,500–3,200 last season.

"Factory owners exploit growers by citing Afghan border closures," he said. "But only C-grade kinnow goes to Afghanistan, and its production is very low this year. A-grade fruit is exported by sea, and that route is open."

Mr Warraich added that Iran has, unlike previous years, reduced duties on kinnow imports and transit to Russia and CARs from the start of the season. "So why are prices collapsing?" he asked.

Former MPA and citrus grower Iftikhar Gondal said kinnow production costs have multiplied since the sharp devaluation of the rupee in 2022. Fertilisers, pesticides and labour have become prohibitively expensive, while returns have collapsed.

"One acre of kinnow orchard fetched around Rs100,000 last year; this season it is barely Rs30,000," he said. "Many growers cannot even find buyers for their orchards." This uncertainty has also led to a drastic drop in land contract rates — from Rs200,000 per acre annually to Rs70,000, he said.

Mr Gondal alleged that factory owners have formed cartels to fix rates, exploiting farmers while continuing exports. He estimated that nearly 30pc of kinnow orchards have already been uprooted, with farmers shifting to maize, sugarcane and other crops.

Zahoor Haral, a mid-level kinnow grower, warned that repeated crop shocks are pushing farmers toward selling land and migrating to cities or abroad. "The rural economy is collapsing," he said, noting that contractors, labourers, transporters and shopkeepers all suffer when farmers lose purchasing power.

He dismissed the argument that low prices are driven by border closures alone. "Exporters buying kinnow at throwaway prices are not dumping it locally; they are shipping it abroad. So the excuse doesn't hold."

Shadow of sanctions

Hovering over the entire crisis is the geopolitical risk tied to Iran. Trump's threat of a 25pc tariff on countries trading with Tehran has unnerved exporters, who fear that dependence on Iranian routes could expose them to penalties or market restrictions.

Growers are now calling for structural reforms: the creation of Kissan Markets to allow direct sales to consumers, promotion of value addition through juice, pulp and powder processing units, and the establishment of a Citrus Control Board — similar to the Sugarcane Control Board — to regulate pricing and transactions between growers and factories.

Until such measures are taken, orchard owners say scenes like the one at the factory gate — fathers pleading to sell fruit at any price to meet family obligations — will only multiply. And Pakistan risks losing not just export markets, but an entire citrus economy once considered a flagship of its agricultural exports, now squeezed between closed borders, rising costs and global politics far beyond farmers' control.